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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2526  
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 9064  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002090

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SUBJECT: PM'S OLIVE BRANCH TO PAK: BUREAUCRACY, PUNDITS SEE  
LITTLE NEW

REF: NEW DELHI 1611

Classified By: DCM Robert Blake, Jr. for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Singh's speech launching the bus service to Nankana Sahib from Amritsar on March 24 continued his efforts to push rapprochement with Pakistan, but Singh still faces resistance from skeptical Indo-Pak watchers in India and his own bureaucracy. Singh's speech was notable in that it gave credit to President Musharraf for his efforts in the peace process and in that it took a long view of the bilateral relationship, floating an eventual Treaty of Peace, Security and Friendship. To this end, the Prime Minister was positive about areas in which the two sides have struggled recently to come to agreement, including the Siachen Glacier, Sir Creek, and the Baglihar Dam, the latter two the subject of composite dialogue meetings on May 23-24 and May 25-26, respectively (Reftel). Singh continued to press for increased economic ties, mentioning specific efforts to increase commercial connectivity between the two Punjabs. End Summary.

What the PM Actually Said (and Did Not Say)  
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12. (U) Prime Minister Singh struck a decidedly positive tone in his March 24 speech at the launch of the Amritsar-Nankana Sahib bus service on March 24, talking about the need for increased people-to-people links in the months and years to come. He praised President Musharraf's "bold steps" against extremism, and said he saw "enormous opportunities" for economic growth and poverty alleviation in the normalization of bilateral ties. Singh said that forward movement is possible on issues like Sir Creek, the Siachen

Glacier, and the Baglihar Dam. He proposed increased people-to-people contacts through "cooperative, consultative mechanisms" that would give Kashmiris more say in addressing their social and economic development needs. His proposal of an eventual Treaty of Peace, Security, and Friendship to cap the relationship received much notice in the Indian media. However, he was careful to also state that "more needs to be done in the interest of both India and Pakistan."

#### Bureaucratic Barnacles Not Convinced

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13. (C) Despite Prime Minister Singh's forward-leaning comments on Pakistan and President Musharraf, Dilip Sinha, Joint Secretary for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran at the Ministry of External Affairs, downplayed the positive aspects of the speech in a reflection of the deep skepticism Singh still faces from within the Indian bureaucracy. Sinha noted that the Prime Minister "speaks with emotion and attachment" regarding Pakistan, but the Treaty he mentioned is "very much in the future." He repeatedly called the Prime Minister's commendation of Musharraf's counter-terrorism record "very generous," and said the MEA's focus is still on how much more needs to be done against terrorism. Sinha added that the terrorism issue stands in the way of much of what Singh mentioned, including increased economic and people-to-people linkages. Similarly, Sinha deflated the Prime Minister's statement on "cooperative consultative mechanisms," which the Joint Secretary said could only be created if and when Pakistan extends the same level of autonomy to the portions of Kashmir under its control. Sinha ended on a positive

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note, however, stating that the PM has to take the lead in the peace process, and that the "constituency of peace" has a momentum of its own.

... Nor are the Pundits

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14. (C) Delhi-based Indo-Pak watchers are similarly cautious about the PM's speech. Several, including Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies Assistant Director Suba Chandran and Associate Editor of the South Asian Media Net Sushant Sareen told Poloff the speech contained "nothing new" -- Chandran underlined that offers for peace treaties go back 40 years, with each side dismissing whatever the other offers. Terrorism expert Ajai Sahni allowed that there was a moderate shift in the PM's tone without affecting the messages many in India received: borders cannot be changed, Kashmir is not the central issue, and, in the meantime, India and Pakistan should continue the path or normalizing relations. Cooperative political structures to tie the two parts of Kashmir together have been a staple of Track-II discussions for some time, according to Sareen. These ideas inch further into Track-I territory with the PM's remarks, but all analysts agreed that until the contours of an Indo-Pak treaty are known, its merits could not be accurately calculated. Most thought the proposal was little more than old chai in a new teacup.

15. (C) MEA's Sinha told the DCM that the PM's speech had not been previewed with the GOP. Suba Chandran and Observer Research Foundation's Garima Singh (half-jokingly) postulated this was the PM's way of firing back to Pakistan President Musharraf for having launched several of his own diplomatic initiatives through the media. Chandran also speculated that an agreement on demilitarizing the Siachen Glacier may be close, and the treaty proposal may have been meant to sweeten the deal. Sushant Sareen cautioned, however, that diplomacy in the PM's office is tightly held, and often leaves the foreign office out of the loop.

Comment: Another Small Step

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¶6. (C) Despite the cynical response from Indo-Pak watchers and the decidedly "in the box" thinking reflected in the MEA's statements, the Prime Minister's speech contained forward-leaning elements that move the process of rapprochement along. MEA's Sinha noted that the Prime Minister has to take the lead on this issue and that the "constituency of peace" has its own momentum.

¶7. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:  
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)  
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